

For years I have been writing bridge articles which challenge what has become standard bidding practice. The QBA Bulletin has been my main forum. I always support my propositions with logical argument. Most of the front line conventions have been my target. My arguments conclusively destroy negative doubles, forcing free bids, better minor, new minor forcing or 2C check back, Lebensohl, transfer replies to 1C, Gazilli, Michaels' cue bids, game invitations and major oriented doubles. I don't seem to have made much impression, however, as these remain the standard. Yet no one has ever been able to put up a counter argument. Too many, it seems just accept that what Charles Goren, Oswald Jacoby, and others from the distant past have said, as holy writ. The following article continues the assault. If you are serious about bridge, please consider what I am saying. Whether or not you find a flaw in my arguments, you have done the really important thing, stopped to think about what you are doing, and why. You cannot possibly think your methods are perfect, if you don't think about them you won't improve on them. It is not sufficient to be told, or even to read in a book, that a particular convention is a good one, there are downsides whenever a convention usurps a natural bid.

### **What is a bidding system? George Cuppaidge Jan 2013**

The word "system" implies something systematic, a process that takes place systematically. Indeed that is just what a bidding system should be. If you hear a series of bids from partner you should have a very good idea of what is in his hand. The well worn remark "Where is the hand you held during the bidding partner?" applies too often.

There really are no bidding systems in regular play today. There are a series of basic guide lines, NT range, Five-card Majors, Better Minor etc., but essentially, after the bidding has begun it tends to be every man for himself. There is very little "systematic" about any system in modern day use after the first round of bidding. Conventional bids are introduced too early and too often. They simply remove partner from the process of bidding. It is important that even the fourth, fifth and sixth rounds of bidding have meaning too. There are millions of possible routes from 1C to 7NT it makes sense to use more of them than we do.

For a system to really be a system, these points seem fundamental.

- With the balance of power, you must be in the bidding. It follows that you must be allowed to open 10 point hands. Where is the logic in decreeing that a hand is worth an overcall but not an opening bid?

- There is logic in decreeing that having failed to open you must not come back in, this will help only one side, not yours.
- Good bidding is an exercise in describing your hand, not simply a hunt for a major fit. In the early rounds you cannot do better than give a picture of your hand. You can fill in the fine details as the bidding proceeds. To give a simple example, you have game-going values and are balanced with a four-card major and partner opens or rebids 1NT. To play in an eight-card major fit is usually right but sometimes it is not. If you can establish partner's exact shape you can make such decisions as playing in NT instead. With doubleton opposite doubleton you should choose to play in a 4-3 major fit.
- If you can describe your whole hand, right down to residual shape below 3NT, why not do it? You can if you use the bidding space efficiently.
- Good bidding is primarily about visualising the hand opposite and how the play will go.
- There is no more powerful information than shape information. It follows that a bid which gives distorted information about shape is a bad bid.
- At low levels, it is quite wrong to make assumptions about the partnership's ultimate goal and make a mis-descriptive bid. A leap to game with a good hand is the prime example.
- Following the simple philosophy that to bid two suits show 5+4+ in those suits leaves only four cards unaccounted for. These can be easily found. To bid a four-card suit ahead of a longer one effectively loses the longer suit. Introducing it shows 5+ in the first.
- Until one partner knows enough about the hand opposite to take control, both partners must make the bid which best describes their shape, within the constraints agreed about the point range for particular actions. It is better to respond 1NT than to show a four-card major with a long minor lower-ranking than partner's suit and without game-going values. Partner will be able to unravel this, but not if you show the major. You will always get to a playable part-score and to the best game or slam. Often you will get to a better part-score than the major-suit obsessed players.
- Two extreme cases of early bids wasted are Better Minor and Check back or New Minor forcing. These potentially meaningful bids are made meaningless.
- Playing Better Minor, it is often impossible to determine with any certainty that opener holds even four cards in his suit.
- Just as clearly wrong is to use two different bids, 1C or 1D to show effectively the same hand, balanced without the suit bid.

- By using 1C for all balanced shapes, 4432 or 4333, the partnership is afforded the maximum room possible to discover the exact shape. Fits in all suits can be found. After a 1D opening, a club fit can be lost. The 1NT response to 1D may have extreme shape, 3307 for example. To open 1D holding four-four in the minors defies belief. Fits in both suits are investigated when you open 1C with this shape. If you do open 1D and rebid 2C you have far less shape than partner will expect.
- It is important to have a bid which cheaply keeps the bidding going when it is your partner's hand which is more important to you than describing your own. The bid of 2C over 1D, 1H, 1S and 1NT and 3C over 2NT is ideal for this purpose. The only proviso is that 1D must be natural, not Better Minor. Over 1C you have so many natural forcing bids it is not as important. With a good raise to 3C or better, begin with 2NT. This 2NT is forcing, but only to 3C.
- Once one partner makes a bid which puts him in charge, the other must continue with the description he has begun. All decisions are made by this player. He can make decisions which to others are impossible, playing in a different trump suit to the one previously agreed, for example.
- That the partnership should steer itself towards NT contracts because the game is Match Points is not only a myth, it is a destructive myth, destructive of real bidding skills. Accurate bidding is the essence of success at all forms of the game.
- You cannot do better than to bid to the right contract whatever the level. A minor suit part-score will often out-score a NT part-score. To fail in NT with a contract of similar worth making in a suit is something to avoid.
- False information about suit length at low levels cannot be retracted, meaning often that the best contract becomes impossible to bid. To open, as some do, 1D holding 4-5 in the minors, is a simple example.
- Both visualisation and competitive decisions are easier when your partnership agreement is to show a long suit before a shorter one, regardless of rank. Big fits mean bad defense. Bypass, for example, a nine-card diamond fit and it becomes impossible to know when to stop bidding and start doubling. If you know that partner's 1H or 1S reply to 1C is his longest or equal longest suit or that 1NT denies four cards in any suit but clubs, your next move is better informed.
- This is just as true when responding to a take-out double. To play major oriented take-out doubles is counter-productive, there are too many good balanced hands for which double is the only bid. To bid

these accurately responder must be allowed to respond in his longest suit.

- There should be only one bid for a particular hand at any point in an auction.
- To make one bid must deny a hand upon which the holder can make a different bid.
- All opening bids, for example, must be defined, and there must be no overlap of meaning. A pre-emptive bid is not made on a hand which qualifies for a simple bid. A simple overcall must promise the same values, albeit only 10 points, as an opening bid. With a weaker hand, make a weak jump overcall or pass. Simple overcalls without values are not helpful.
- As a general principle, the systemic meaning of a minimum bid in each of the five denominations at any point in an auction should be discussed within the partnership. It is wasteful not to do so.
- Third and fourth hand bidding is an entirely different matter, tactics rather than constructive bidding is often the objective. Lead opener's suit applies doubly.
- To open or respond in the higher ranking of two 5+ card suits is an enormous space-saver, it carries the powerful information that the bidder will never hold five cards in a suit higher ranking than the one he bids. Once you have shown a 5+5+ there are only three cards unaccounted for.
- It is actually wasteful of bidding space to require opener to hold extra values for a reverse after a two-over-one. To fail to rebid in a higher ranking suit must deny four cards in it. The partnership is headed for game at least, make sure it is the right game.
- Game invitations are a waste of valuable bids. Not only do they set you up for a double, they waste the tactical advantage that a pass with something in reserve brings. More making part-scores and better slam bidding machinery is compensation for the occasional missed game. Making a part-score with the field failing in game or game-try is a big result. Your opponents gloat when they push you from 2S to 3S, or from 1NT to 2NT, don't do it to yourself. A plus score is, generally, a good score. Relax, enjoy and live with the fact that a missed game is not the end of the world. When you pass your flat nine count opposite his 1NT, congratulate him (and yourself) when he makes seven tricks.
- It is sensible to upgrade control rich 17 counts, and avoid a 1NT opening bid.
- Playing 2NT as always forcing solves a multitude of bidding problems at no cost at all. Once "no invitations" has been accepted, this follows.

It is not a natural bid wasted, as is 2D, New Minor Forcing, for example.

- If your early bids are natural and descriptive it is a simple step for a partner, with a strong hand, to take over at some point, often by bidding 2NT, and get an accurate picture of your whole hand. You will play in the right fit and key shortages can be revealed.
- Keep your part-score and game bidding simple, save science for where it counts, slams. Bidding is hugely simplified by the understanding that bids which may be ambiguous in meaning to some are game forcing to you. The more you say about close games the less likely you are to make them.
- In contested auctions adopt the simple understanding that double (for take-out but not promising shape) is used to distinguish a game-forcing bid from a competitive bid. Where double is available, bids are merely competitive.
- The negative double is a useless action, but this is not the place to prove it. Double used as directly above is far more helpful

I hope readers will keep these points in mind when working on their own system. My own standard system which follows the philosophy espoused here is set out in QBA Articles, on the website.